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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran: Nuclear Program
3. Israeli Ambassador to U.S. Danny Ayalon

Key stories in the media:

This morning, Israel Radio reported that FM Silvan Shalom has decided to cut short the term of Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon at the conclusion of a probe by a civil service investigator who has just arrived in Washington. During the weekend, all media highlighted what Yediot referred to in its front-page headline Sunday as "the spat" between Ayalon and Shalom or, more correctly, the FM's wife, Judy Nir-Moses-Shalom. Ayalon, who is facing the prospect of a civil service investigation into allegations that his wife treated embassy staff abusively, alleged in a letter to A-G Menachem Mazuz that Shalom was meddling inappropriately with personnel affairs in the Washington embassy. Ayalon claims that Shalom, at the urging of his wife, had the ambassador's personal aide dismissed because of Mrs. Shalom's displeasure with the way he handled Madonna's trip to Israel. All media view the affair as an episode in the dispute between Shalom and PM Sharon. Several media reported that Sunday Sharon's bureau declared its support for Ayalon.

Leading media reported that the police are in a state of high alert today due to the possibility that right-wing activists could attempt to shut down major roads throughout the country at 5 p.m. as a dress rehearsal for this summer's demonstrations against the disengagement. Several media reported that on Sunday, police raided the offices of "Habayit Haleumi" (The National Home), a radical right-wing group that has adopted the civil disobedience tactics of Zu Artzeinu from the mid-1990s. Several media reported that the defense establishment has devised a plan to greatly increase the protection of the Temple Mount.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted senior Israeli defense officials as saying that Israel has given its approval for the deployment of hundreds of armed PA police in all West Bank cities to crack down on crime. The officials were quoted as saying that the move is intended to strengthen the PA ahead of the transfer of additional cities to Palestinian control. Today, Jerusalem Post quoted an Israeli security official as saying that if the PA has confiscated the weapons of fugitives in Tulkarm and Jericho, then Qalqilya could be transferred to Palestinian security control in the coming week. Comparing formal bans on talks with Hamas with past curbs on talks with the PLO, a senior Israeli military official told Israel Radio Monday that prominent Hamas officials recently elected in PA municipal council elections are holding regular contacts with IDF liaison and coordination officers.

Maariv reported that the construction of a fence encompassing Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim will start in a few weeks, despite the U.S. administration's firm opposition. The newspaper reported that the timing of the move is not arbitrary and that it is meant to create facts on the ground before disengagement. Ha'aretz and Yediot quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying at Sunday's cabinet meeting that Hamas is growing stronger, becoming a power in its own right, parallel to the PA, and building a popular army under the PA's nose. Yediot quoted incoming Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin as saying that Israel should prepare for a resumption of terror.

On Sunday, leading media reported that the security situation on the Lebanese border heated up on Friday, as IDF planes, gunships and tanks destroyed Hizbullah posts in Lebanon, in response to Hizbullah shelling of IDF positions.

All media reported that the cabinet voted Sunday 16-2 to approve an emergency amendment to the Citizenship and Entry to Israel

Family Law that limits family unification for Palestinians from the territories married to Israeli Arabs, such that only some 200 to 250 Palestinians a year will be able to get Palestinian citizenship. Hatzofe bannered: "First Loophole Into 'Right of Return.'" Israel Radio reported that the police are barring 64,000 Palestinians who have committed criminal offenses from entering Israel, but have not notified them of the decision and have not explained it.

Israel Radio reported that this morning, at a checkpoint near Tulkarm, a Palestinian who tried to stab a soldier was shot dead.

On Sunday, Yediot reported that for the first time, Israel will open a discreet diplomatic representation in Dubai.

Yediot quoted Vice Premier Shimon Peres as saying on Sunday in an interview with the Israeli-Arab newspaper Panorama that he has recently met with senior Iraqi leaders who told him they want to make peace with Israel.

All media reported on an escalating disagreement between Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Vice PM Ehud Olmert.

Yediot quoted Sharon as saying in an interview with Time Magazine that the Oslo Accords were the worst mistake that any Israeli government has made.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that the purpose of PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas's trip to the U.S. at the end of the month is to present the PA's achievements and to convince the U.S. about the progress of security and administrative reforms in the PA. The newspaper reported that at recent disengagement coordination talks, the PA has demanded that Israel operate the "safe passage" procedure between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

All media reported that on Sunday, Palestinians commemorated the anniversary of what they call the "Nakba" (catastrophe) -- the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of their people with the creation of Israel. Maariv's headline: "Abu Mazen, Too, in Mourning Over the Establishment of the State of Israel." Ha'aretz cited New York Times as saying that the FBI has begun questioning reporters who had contact with Pentagon official Larry Franklin, who has been charged with disclosing classified information to AIPAC officials.

On Sunday, Maariv devoted a double page to pleasure trips to the U.S. by Israelis this summer -- including tips about five popular sites.

----- 1. Mideast: -----

Summary: -----

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "In reality, Sharon's initiative might crush once and for all the chance to settle the dispute on the basis of establishing a Palestinian state beside Israel."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "If Abbas sticks to his determination to hold the elections on time, he will succeed. Israel should not intervene in the matter, because nothing good can come of these elections, whether they are held on time or postponed."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Fifty-seven years of independence, and the State of Israel still does not have two things that a proper state cannot do without: permanent borders and an immigration policy.... From now on, clear rules must be put in place."

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Gewirtz opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot:

Block Quotes: -----

1. "What Does Condoleezza Know?"

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (May 15): "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice lavished praise on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in an interview she gave Larry King on the eve of Independence Day. Rice said Sharon was admirable for the leadership he is displaying in his willingness to divide the land of Israel.... [Will] he indeed? It is hard to find any person with authority in the Israeli government who knows for sure where the disengagement initiative is going. This historic move appears increasingly like a chain of improvisations rather than a calculated, well-considered outline that is being carried out

judiciously.... [The disengagement move] implies that Israel will renounce (at least) part of the territories and hand them over to the Palestinians. But in reality, Sharon's initiative might crush once and for all the chance to settle the dispute on the basis of establishing a Palestinian state beside Israel. After all, if Sharon intends to make do with pulling out of the Gaza Strip and four settlements in northern Samaria, then entrench himself behind a wall and sever the economic ties between the PA and Israel, he will be condemning the Palestinians to conditions that would not enable them to build a viable state. By this seeming renunciation, Sharon is storing the fuel for reigniting the conflict on the day after the disengagement. Does Condoleezza Rice know something that we don't?"

II. "Nothing Good Will Come of These Elections"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (May 16): "Nothing good for Israel can come out of the upcoming elections in the Palestinian Authority.... If the vote is held as scheduled in another two months, there is a good chance the Hamas will register some real achievements. It might not win, but it will come out of the elections as a key political force that will have an important influence -- and not a positive one -- on the negotiations with Israel. If, on the other hand, if the elections are postponed, it might destabilize the current relative security calm.... Abbas, attending an Arab-Latin American summit in Brasilia, issued an announcement that he has no intention of postponing the elections. He feels confident ahead of his upcoming meeting in Washington with President George W. Bush next week. His confidence is derived from the broad international sympathy he is enjoying and polls showing that he is a popular leader among the Palestinians. He apparently is not bothered by the criticism being leveled at him by Israel, nor by the vehement criticism of him by Fatah veteran Farouk Kaddoumi, who has accused him of surrendering to Israeli-American dictates. If Abbas sticks to his determination to hold the elections on time, he will succeed. Israel should not intervene in the matter, because nothing good can come of these elections, whether they are held on time or postponed."

III. "Setting Limits"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (May 15): "Fifty-seven years of independence, and the State of Israel still does not have two things that a proper state cannot do without: permanent borders and an immigration policy.... Well, it is time to put things in order a little bit. The Prime Minister is trying, in his way, to start to get us a border. Today his cabinet will hold the first discussion of its kind, an historical one, about 'immigration policy.' Better late than never.... From now on, clear rules must be put in place. Who is an Israeli? Will all ten children of an Israeli Arab man and a Palestinian woman who married and have been living in Nablus for ten years receive an Israeli identity card? Will anyone who wants to marry a woman (or a man) from anywhere in the world be able to force the state to accept his or her new spouse as an ordinary citizen?.... A series of restrictions will be imposed on those who wish to acquire Israeli citizenship. The fence will be made higher. The Jewish state will defend itself. Nothing more than what is being done currently in Europe in the face of the Islamic invasion, but also nothing less -- mostly in light of the fact that the Jews have no other country. The Prime Minister and the director of the National Security Council [Giora Eiland] have only one goal: to preserve the current proportion in which Jews make up three-quarters of the population of the state, not to let it dissipate, not to lose it."

IV. "Back to the Return"

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Gewirtz opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (May 16): "With the sound of sirens that opened the Palestinian Nakba day, the yearning for Jerusalem and the speeches about the right of return, the strong resemblance between Israelis and Palestinians once again turns out as a tragic joke.... The validity of the [Palestinian] insistence on 'return' is identical to 'not one inch' declarations by the dreamers of Greater Israel. If one infers from shared and historical facts, one may assume that the gathering of the Palestinian Diaspora will be very similar to what the pioneering Jewish minority that created the State of Israel for the Jewish people found out -- millions [of Jews] did not stream into the country, and most Jews (including many Israelis) have chosen to live in other countries."

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Unless it is stopped, a nuclear Iran would overshadow the entire region.... The Iranian clock may be running faster than the world clock."

Block Quotes:

"The World Versus a Nuclear Iran"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (May 15):
"International acquiescence to Iran's conduct would shatter the framework for the nonproliferation campaign. Additional countries would be quick to conclude that they wouldn't suffer should they follow in its footsteps. In the Middle East, the effect would be even more immediate and severe. Israel wouldn't be the only one to find it difficult to do nothing. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey would identify an Iranian threat, at least in terms of regional supremacy.... Unless it is stopped, a nuclear Iran would overshadow the entire region. The three leading countries in the European Union -- Britain, Germany and France -- are close to despairing of Iran's antics. The next stage is a report to the Security Council, which would consider sanctions. Only after these have been exhausted would it be time to use force, American or otherwise. This is essentially the correct course of action, whose weakness lies in the fact that, meanwhile, time is passing -- and the Iranian clock may be running faster than the world clock."

13. Israeli Ambassador to U.S. Danny Ayalon:

Summary:

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If there is anyone who should be interested in ensuring that we have the best representation in the most important capitals around the world, it is the foreign minister."

Block Quotes:

"Shalom's Scandal"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (May 16):
"It seems that Silvan Shalom has nothing better to busy himself with than trying to fire one of our most successful ambassadors, Danny Ayalon in Washington. Ayalon seemed a lackluster appointment almost three years ago, a relatively unknown foreign service official whose chief virtue was that he was acceptable to both Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and then foreign minister Shimon Peres. By now, however, Ayalon has by all accounts accomplished a rare triple-play to which all Washington ambassadors should aspire: he is well-respected in the U.S. administration, and in Congress, and has established himself as an effective spokesman in the American media. He has done this, in part, by maintaining close ties to the Prime Minister's Office, where he served as Sharon's national security adviser, without shunning his minister, to the extent that is possible given Shalom's own conflicts with Sharon.... [But] Shalom is reportedly upset that Ayalon has been unable to reverse or mitigate the foreign minister's poor reputation in Washington, where he is not taken seriously.... Shalom has shown he does know how to work hard, such as when he campaigned to convince Europe to label Hizbullah as a terrorist organization, or his efforts to improve ties with moderate Arab states. Yet there is so much more that could be done. If there is anyone who should be interested in ensuring that we have the best representation in the most important capitals around the world, it is the foreign minister. That he seems more concerned about having his and his wife's picture snapped with Madonna is an embarrassment and a scandal, and certainly no boon to his political future."

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